

Last Friday, Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, visited Mobile, signaling the start of a new wave of local shipbuilding jobs. Austal USA's unique trimaran design littoral combat ship (LCS) is a hit with the Navy.

The South Alabama shipbuilder already handed the Navy the keys to one new LCS ship, the USS Independence, back in January 2010, and another, the USS Coronado, is currently under construction.

In late December, Congress approved the Navy's dual buy of up to 20 more LCS ships – half of which will be built by Mobile's Austal and the remainder by Marinette Marine of Wisconsin. On December 29, the contract for the first of the 10 additional LCS ships was given to Austal, and on March 17, the Navy awarded Austal a \$368 million contract to build another LCS.

The ten ship contract is worth over \$3.5 billion and is expected to more than double the number of Austal's local employees, bringing total employment to nearly 3,800.

When Secretary Mabus toured Austal's manufacturing facilities last week, he announced the next two Austal LCS ships will be named the USS Jackson and USS Montgomery for the state capitals of neighboring Mississippi and Alabama.

Austal, which had only a handful of employees when it first located in Mobile just over a decade ago, has made a name for itself with its innovative production methods at its world class aluminum shipyard. In addition to the LCS, Austal's employees are also building Joint High Speed Vessels for the U.S. military.

The success of Austal is welcome news for South Alabama and important for the long-term economic future of our area and the defense of our nation.

U.S. Military Action in Libya Raises Questions:

On March 19, President Obama announced U.S. military forces "would commence operations to assist an international effort authorized by the United Nations Security Council and undertaken with the support of European allies and Arab partners, to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and address the threat posed to international peace and security by the crisis in Libya."

Acting under the authority of a UN resolution, the president failed to seek the advice and consent of Congress before committing our military to a potentially drawn out conflict in Libya.

Ironically, by his action to involve the country in a new war, the president has done something he has so far failed to do in other spheres as chief executive – unify Congressional conservatives and liberals.

House Speaker John Boehner has asked the president to provide a "clear and robust assessment of the scope, objective, and purpose of our mission in Libya and how it will be achieved." As the Speaker put it, "A United Nations Security Council resolution does not substitute for a U.S. political and military strategy."

Liberal Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown echoed the Speaker's concerns during a recent interview on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" program: "I think the questions Speaker Boehner asked were generally legitimate questions. I think they were the right questions."

Back before the president took office, he gave an interview with the Boston Globe in which he stated, "The President does not have the power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation."

President Obama has not only failed to seek Congressional approval for U.S. military involvement in Libya, but he has also failed to clearly define what our national interests are in Libya, what our mission is there and how we will achieve it.

President Obama has promised to turn control of the Libyan no-fly zone over to our NATO allies. The coalition's track record, however, has already become one of squabbling fits and starts.

What if our NATO allies fail to follow through? Will the U.S. be left to reenter the conflict to conduct military operations in what could devolve into a long-term civil war?

America is a beacon to the oppressed of the world and, indeed, our nation has long sought to defend the defenseless against the oppression of tyrants. Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi's attacks on his own people are atrocious and must be condemned.

However, the U.S. should not commit to military action without both Congressional consent and a plan of action.

As Congress returns this week, President Obama will be pressed for a detailed explanation of our military's role in Libya and how our national interests are being served by sending more American men and women into harm's way.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.